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SUBJECT: WEEKLY NEPAL MEDIA REPORT: JULY 1 - 7, 2003

- STATE FOR NP, AC, PM
- STATE FOR IN/R/MR
- STATE FOR SA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO
- STATE FOR SA/PPD

11. POLITICAL AFFAIRS

-- Ten left parties for new constitution: Ten left parties demanded (7/6) for a new constitution as the only way out of the present political crisis. (Media reports, 7/7)

-- U.S. Ambassador against Maoists: Although the U.S. has not formally exhibited any activities against the government-Maoists peace talks process, it is continuing to pressure the government not to give any special concessions to the Maoists. U.S. Ambassador Michael Malinowski in a formal meeting with Prime Minister Thapa expressed the concern that concessions to the Maoists would be highly counterproductive. The U.S. has expressed objection to the government-Maoists agreement of restricting the movement of the army within five kilometers of the barracks. The inclusion of the Maoists by America on its terrorist watch list hinted that it preferred a repressive course on the Maoists. The diplomatic community is saying that America is about to put the Maoists on the real terrorist list by accusing them of murders, abductions, extortion, etc. The Maoists, too, have become ignited against the Americans in recent days. (leftist "Sanghu," V/W, 7/7)

-- Five parties come up with new agenda: Five political parties incorporated secularism and abrogation of the Raj Sabha Standing Committee (king's advisory council) as their major demands in order to retrieve the country off the current political crisis. The other salient points of the agenda are: clip the wings of the king; restructure National Assembly; limit His/Her Majesty titles to the king, queen and crown prince; have a new national anthem; and make public royal assets. (Media reports, 7/6)

-- "UML is again on the brink of being split."
(centrist "Naya Kiran," V/W, 7/4)

-- Information Minister says government for polls at earliest: The government is committed to holding elections at the earliest, Information Minister and government spokesperson Kamal Thapa said (7/4). (pro-India "Himalayan Times," E/D, 7/5)

-- King less powerful now: The king is in maze". He has closed all the doors by himself". The king has become constitutional now and won't interfere in the government's work. Legally, he won't be able to oust Thapa and appoint a new prime minister. (centrist "Ghatana Ra Bichar," V/W, 7/2)

-- Government employees to continue running local bodies: The government decided (6/30) to run the local bodies through government employees for the next one year. (centrist "Kathmandu Post," E/D, 7/1)

PEACE TALKS

-- Governments urges Maoists for talks: There are some "unclear and controversial" issues stalling the resumption of talks, the government's spokesperson said and called on the Maoists to come to the negotiating table "unconditionally". ("The Himalayan Times," 7/5)

-- Maoists, government meet: The government and Maoist talks teams held an informal meeting at an undisclosed location in Kathmandu on Thursday (7/3) morning. The meeting, however, could not reach any agreement. ("The Himalayan Times," 7/4)

-- Arms cache recovered in Bangladesh: Shipment believed to be destined for Nepal's rebels: Bangladesh security agencies seized 180 kg of explosives and 93,192 bullets allegedly meant for Nepal's Maoists in different parts of the country over the past few days. At least, six persons have been arrested so far. This is the first instance of Bangladeshi territories and it

s citizens being used as conduits for supplying arms and ammunitions to Nepal's rebels. ("The Kathmandu Post," 7/4)

12. STUDENT UNREST

-- Schools reopen: The indefinite strike declared by the organizations of private and boarding schools was lifted today (7/2), following an agreement between the government, agitating student unions, and private school bodies. (Media reports, 7/3)

-- Schools shutdown: Over 8,500 schools began an indefinite shut down from (6/30) as the group of seven student organizations and the associations of private and boarding schools refused to budge from their respective demands. (Media reports, 7/1)

13. NEPAL-U.S.

-- Nepali troops for Iraq: The government is holding discussions following a request from the United States Central Command, asking for Nepali troops in its peacekeeping mission in Iraq, the Minister of Information and Communications said. He hinted that the number of Nepali troops would be somewhere between 800 and 1,000. ("The Kathmandu Post," 7/5)

-- USAID grant for strengthening rule of law: The USAID has granted Nepal 7.5 million dollars to support initiatives for strengthening the rule of law, enhancing access to justice and advancing accountability and anti-corruption initiatives over the next three years. Dr. Madhav Prasad Ghimire, joint secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Wendy

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Chamberlin, head of USAID for Asia and the Near East, signed the agreement on 7/3. (Media reports, 7/4)

-- The garment fatwa: "In withdrawing support from the Nepali garment industry and boycotting tourism, our American remonstrators seem to have forgotten the social problems that similarly draconian measures have brought to the South Asian region in the past. While their proposals may appease personal egos, they are counter-productive when fighting injustice. The scandal surrounding the Harkin bill of 1994 in Bangladesh is illustrative in this regard." (Opinion in centrist "Nepali Times, E/W, 7/4. For full article, go to <http://www.nepalnews.com/ntimes/issue152/>)

-- Senator's decision childish: "It was a childish reaction of the U.S. Senator, who withdrew a bill granting duty privileges to Nepali garments, because the Nepali government deported some Tibetans". You'd think that somebody of the stature of a U.S. Senator would be magnanimous." (Letter to editor in "Himalayan Times," 7/1)

14. OTHERS

-- UNESCO puts Kathmandu Valley on the danger list: The Kathmandu Valley has been put on the List of World Heritage in Danger (LWHD) by UNESCO, posing a threat to Nepal's tourism industry and exposing the inefficiency and callousness of the government to conserve the medieval monuments in the capital city. (Media reports, 7/7)

-- 94 percent refugees appeal against JVT report: Around 94 percent of the Bhutanese refugees languishing in Khudunabari camp filed appeals to the office of the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team (JVT), challenging its verification report made public on June 18. (Media reports, 7/4)

MALINOWSKI